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## Poets in a Transnatural Landscape: Coleridge, Nature, Poetry

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This essay presents a fresh reading of the relation between poetry, nature, and their pairing in criticism and poetics, in and through the example of Coleridge. It therefore sets out to explore anew what might feel at first glance like familiar territory, but that is necessarily part of the point – and indeed, a characteristic of the connection between poetry and nature that Coleridge makes at the beginning of volume two of *Biographia Literaria*:

During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination. The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moon-light or sun-set diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge identifies the *poetry* of nature – figured in the vivifying effects of moonlight or sunset over a ‘known and familiar landscape’ – with the affective qualities of nature’s self-altering. That self-altering fuses, in productive synthesis, qualities that he invests in the words ‘nature’ and ‘imagination’: recognition and modification, familiarity and originality are in play at the same time. In effect, Coleridge makes a three-way analogy between the self-altering states of the natural world, the self-altering activity of language in poetry, and the altering of the self in and through the experience of either. He calls upon the nature of his experience of nature to suggest a psychotropic poetics, in which the creation of the ‘charm’ – a word aptly connoting incantation, fascination and delight – becomes an active process on the part of the poet. In so doing, Coleridge implicates within that poetic activity a similarly active, physical participation in the sensuous dynamics of his own bodily movement through landscape as a walker, watchful and alive to its immersive vitality. The embodiment of this analogous relationship, and its implications for both the idea of nature and the idea of poetry, are the subject of this essay.

Raymond Williams remarked that ‘nature’ is ‘perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language’, capable of denoting (among other things) ‘the essential quality or character of something’, ‘the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both’, and the physical universe, with or without humans.<sup>2</sup> The essential connection between ‘nature’ and birth – present in the etymological root of the Latin *natura* – was fundamental to the early theorisation of the ‘Romantic’, which is characterised (for example) by August Wilhelm Schlegel as the urge to bring forth ‘neuen und wundervollen Geburten’ (‘new and wonderful births’).<sup>3</sup> Re-origination, becoming and self-altering was and remains implicate in both the idea of nature and – in and through Romantic poetics – the idea of poetry and art. As this point also implies, the experience of both nature and poetry is at once sensuously and culturally mediated, spontaneous and cultivated, to varying degrees. Such experience – like the impulse to utterance to which it relates – involves a deeply entangled aesthetic. The

altered landscape in Coleridge's depiction of the 'poetry of nature' contains both a riddle and its clue.<sup>4</sup>

I use the word 'transnatural' to signal the peculiar relation between poetry, nature and movement through landscape that this essay seeks to conceive and describe, for reasons that I develop in what follows.<sup>5</sup> Its etymology suggests a 'crossing', altering and self-transcending of nature without necessarily implying an essential *separation* from nature, as the word 'supernatural' so often does. In this sense, the transnatural can both symbolise and enable a fresh perspective on 'known and familiar' binary distinctions – between nature and culture, life and art, ecocentrism and humanism – and modify these in a new mutuality, like the moonlight on the landscape, in Coleridge's image, that yields its poetry. As a poet and thinker so richly engaged with both the physical life and the cultural signification of nature, Coleridge presents a dynamic case study of a writer living the dilemmas of that relationship, and a body of work that has held particular interest for me since my schooldays. In this essay, I write – as I always do, but do not always say so – as both a poet and a critic, and include at the end a poem of my own, with a brief note on the connection between my argument and my poetry.

Before turning to the character of Coleridge's sensitivity to the natural world, as found in his language, it is central to my theme (and to Coleridge) to acknowledge the more-than-human character of that world. We inhabit a living order at once within and beyond the human. To describe that order as 'more-than-human' is to resist the subordination of that order to ourselves, and to affirm that we are implicate within its life. Ecocriticism has sought 'an earth-centred approach to literary studies', in Cheryll Glotfelty's phrase,<sup>6</sup> but many of its variants slip readily into the kind of binary opposition between ecocentrism and humanism to which I refer above, which simply reproduces the crude distinction between nature and culture (or art, or poetry) that ecocriticism elsewhere seeks to transcend. Coleridge wrote that 'we can live only by feeding abroad',<sup>7</sup> and I have described elsewhere how the provisional psychology of becoming found throughout his work – that I call elective organicism – involves a willing exposure to living forms beyond the mind's deliberate control.<sup>8</sup> An awareness of this pattern enables a critical approach that could be characterised as psychobiocentric, or psychophysiological, and which focuses more acutely on the continuous, mutually self-altering relationship between the human and the more-than-human – between the natural, the imaginal, and the artful.

In December 1800, still awestruck by the view from his window at Keswick, Coleridge called himself 'an Eye-servant of the Goddess Nature'.<sup>9</sup> What's so striking in Coleridge's writing on the natural world, however, is that it transcends the merely visual: it is the holistic quality of its sensuous responsiveness, the sense of experience at once preverbal and preconceptual that – whatever else it does, physiologically and psychically – draws out the distinctive life of his language. 'I love fields & woods & mounta[ins] with almost a visionary fondness', he told his brother George in 1798 (*Letters* I 397): 'almost' *visionary*, because nonetheless *sensuous*, as Seamus Perry observes.<sup>10</sup> This brief passage from a letter of 1803 is characteristic:

I never find myself alone within the embracement of rocks & hills, a traveller up an alpine road, but my spirit courses, drives, and eddies, like a Leaf in Autumn: a wild activity, of thoughts, imaginations, feelings, and impulses of motion, rises up from within me (*Letters*, II 916)

The rhythm and dynamism of the language is invocatory and performative, conveying what Coleridge describes affectively as well as semantically. The phrase 'but my spirit courses, drives, and eddies, like a Leaf in Autumn' is trochaic – a metre recognised from its origin as a

‘running’ rhythm – while the touch of a caesura effected by the commas before ‘but’ and between ‘eddies’ and ‘like’, together with its varied assonance, consonance and alliteration,<sup>11</sup> both prolongs and propels its sense of movement, just as (for Coleridge) a poem should gather and release its energies:

Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward. (*Biographia*, II 14)

The rhythms of the physical body, continuously responding to the living environment within which it travels by its own power – whether as walker, serpent or sound-wave – feed and figure the rhythms of the psychical body, manifest in the self-patterning life of language and poetry. Coleridge’s utterance of the ‘wild activity’ stimulated by his experience of the natural world is intensely participatory, reciprocal and empathetic in character: a quality that David Abram – drawing on the anthropology of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, rather than Coleridge – makes fundamental to the environmentalist ethic he advocates.<sup>12</sup> For Abram, this involves

the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives. Prior to all our verbal reflections, at the level of our spontaneous, sensorial engagement with the world around us, we are *all* animists.<sup>13</sup>

H.W. Piper long ago recognised a form of ‘Romantic animism’ at work in Coleridge and Wordsworth,<sup>14</sup> but its distinctive character has never been so vividly expressed as in Coleridge’s notebook:

Important remark just suggests itself—13 Nov<sup>r</sup> 1809—That it is by a negation and voluntary Act of *no*-thinking that we think of earth, air, water &c as dead—It is necessary for our limited powers of Consciousness that we should be brought to this negative state, & that [it] should pass into Custom—but likewise necessary that at times we should awake & step forward—& this is effected by Poetry & Religion /—. The Extenders of Consciousness—Sorrow, Sickness, Poetry, Religion—.—The truth is, we stop in the sense of Life just when we are not *forced* to go on—and then adopt a permission of our feelings for a precept of our Reason— (*Notebooks*, III 3632)

‘Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind / Cannot bear very much reality’.<sup>15</sup> Coleridge admits that the aperture of consciousness must narrow – must in some sense filter out the coursing life of the elements – in order for us to function without being overwhelmed by the rush and flux of being, but likewise that the aperture of consciousness should dilate, to let in that life and energy, in order for our own being to grow, develop, and live. Tellingly, however, for the purposes of my argument, Coleridge relates heightened participatory experience of the *natural* world to the action, effects and participatory experience of our *cultural* life, and in particular ‘Poetry & Religion’, the ‘Extenders of Consciousness’.<sup>16</sup> Our spontaneous responsiveness to the natural world, both Abram and Coleridge might agree, is also mediated by our culture, both as a form of life in itself and – potentially at least – the quickening agent of further life.<sup>17</sup>

Language – in the example of Coleridge’s description of the experience he derives from the natural world, given above – conveys at once a response to life and a living charge of its own: the power to excite and educe more life. It mediates between the preverbal life of

participatory perception in his own experience, the impulse to utterance aroused in and through that experience, and the experience of the reader, which is at once both verbal, referential and conceptual, and affective, aesthetic and supra-verbal.

Coleridge is often intensely and simultaneously aware of both the ineffable quality of his experience and the impulse to speak of it: indeed, the ineffable drives the effusion. He writes in Malta:

O said I as I looked on the blue, yellow, green, & purple green Sea, with all its hollows & swells, & cut-glass surfaces—O what an Ocean of lovely forms!—and I was vexed, teased, that the sentence sounded like a play of Words. But it was not, the mind within me was struggling to express the marvellous distinctness & unconfounded personality of each of the million millions of forms, & yet the undivided Unity in which they subsisted. (*Notebooks*, II 2344)

Coleridge's acknowledgment of the struggle to express in language the fulness of his sensuous experience foreshadows the 'essentially *vital*' struggle 'to idealize and to unify' that he later identifies with the activity of the imagination (*Biographia*, I 304). As ever, he emphasises both 'multeity' and 'unity',<sup>18</sup> both within and beyond his experience – and as such, the dynamic, constitutive *relationship* between forms that is inseparable from the forms themselves. In the struggle to express that dynamic relationship adequately, beyond a mere 'play of Words', language itself must take on a performative, invocatory life beyond the merely abstract or referential, even if it can never exhaust or wholly comprise the sensuous, preverbal experience of being. Indeed, that 'teasing' sense in the stimulus of immersive sensuous experience is animating in itself:

Sometimes when I earnestly look at a beautiful Object or Landscape, it seems as if I were on the *brink* of a Fruition still denied—as if Vision were an *appetite*: even as a man would feel, who having put forth all his muscular strength in an act of prosilience, is at that very moment *held back*—he leaps & yet moves not from his place.— (*Notebooks*, III 3767)

However 'vexing' that tension between being, utterance and becoming may be – 'the copresence of Feeling & Life, limitless by their very essence, with Form, by its very essence limited' (*Notebooks*, I 1561) – it is nonetheless an *appetite*, a *desire* in which impulse, action and invention meet and manifest in one and the same moment. The fruition is, in effect, intrinsic to the impulse: the end is in the means.

Although not 'poetry' in a narrowly formal sense of the word, Coleridge's attempts to evoke his experience of landscape in prose – as in the notebooks and letters – embody this essentially poetic dynamic. It is characterised there by his particular sensitivity to the *mutually modifying* activity within his experience of the natural world – the relationship between self-altering states in nature, the self-altering activity of language and the altering of the self by virtue of both. One living state meets another and each is changed, while yet continuous with itself, as here:

The first sight of green fields with the numberless nodding gold cups, & the winding River with Alders on its bank affected me, coming out of a city confinement, with the sweetness & power of a sudden Strain of Music.— (*Notebooks*, I 1256)

Coleridge conveys the irruptive, ecstatic quality of this experience in synaesthetic terms: a sensuous intertwining that embodies the intertwining of the percipient being and the life it

perceives. At the same time, the peculiarly Coleridgean tick of punctuation at the end of this note – full stop, dash, full stop – acts as the tacit inscription of the reality that exceeds his language, and the reality provoked by that language. Both the scene he describes and the language that he uses evoke a synaesthetic ‘music’,<sup>19</sup> in ways that recall the famous lines added to ‘The Eolian Harp’ in *Sibylline Leaves*:

O! the one Life within us and abroad,  
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,  
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,  
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where—<sup>20</sup>

This involves a dance and patterning of sound and diction that responds to the dynamic self-ordering and spontaneous self-altering that fascinates Coleridge, as in his luminous account of the murmuration of starlings that he saw in November 1799: the birds move ‘in vast Flights, borne along like smoke, mist’, ‘still expanding, or contracting, thinning or condensing, now glimmering and shivering, now thickening, deepening, blackening!’ (*Notebooks*, I 1589).<sup>21</sup> The sibilance and consonance, at once connected and separated by the long, open vowel-sounds that breathe through and bind the self-iterating verbs to their movement, is incantatory in its effect: ‘now’ and ‘now’ builds to the dactylic cadence of the final three words, to leave its own shape and motion still resonant in the reader or listener.

Coleridge is particularly drawn towards water, to which self-altering states are quintessential. In the following note, he describes a landscape at once animated and haunted by the visible and audible qualities of water in motion:

The waterfall at the head of the vale (the circular mountain walled vale) white, stedfast, silent from Distance / —the River belonging to it, smooth, full, silent—the Lake into which it empties also silent / yet the noise of waters every where / Something distant / something near, Tis far off, & yet every where / —and the pillar of smoke / the smooth winter fields—the *indistinct* Shadows in the Lake are all eloquent of Silence— (*Notebooks*, I 1784)

Coleridge produces a kind of sensory prism in language, in which the diffraction of sound and vision across the scene – a feeling of distance brought close by dislocated yet ubiquitous sounds – creates an ecstatic space-time at once elusive and hauntingly palpable. As in ‘The Eolian Harp’, where ‘The stilly murmur of the distant Sea / Tells us of Silence’ (*Poems*, 52), his language makes this ‘silence’ active and ‘eloquent’, an operative mystery.

Time and again, the paradoxical constancy of the Heraclitean fluency of being that water embodies erupts in Coleridge with the force of revelation, as in these examples:

The stedfast rainbow in the fast-moving, hurrying, hail-mist!—what a congregation of Images & Feelings, of fantastic Permanence amidst the rapid Change of Tempest—quietness the Daughter of Storm— (*Notebooks*, I 1246)

Sameness in a Waterfall, in the foam Islands of a fiercely boiling Pool at the bottom of the Waterfall, from infinite Change (*Notebooks*, I 1725)<sup>22</sup>

The quiet circle in which Change and Permanence *co-exist*, not by combination or juxtaposition, but by an absolute annihilation of difference / column of smoke, the fountains before St Peter’s, waterfalls / GOD!—Change without loss—change by a

perpetual growth, that <once constitutes & annihilates change> the past, & the future included in the Present // oh! it is awful. (*Notebooks*, II 2832)

The stillness and synaesthetic ‘quietness’ of the rainbow in the hurrying ‘hail-mist’, the ‘sameness’ generated by ‘infinite Change’ in the figure of the waterfall, and the fusion of change and permanence in the fountains and waterfalls, again fold time into an experiential singularity: an ecstatic apprehension of ‘Change without loss’, a ‘change by a perpetual growth’ that for Coleridge can also signify – in figurative terms that both draw upon and evoke contemplation – the activity of the divine. The continuous, self-altering activity of natural forms in relation to each other bears a two-way relation, through Coleridge’s language, to the continuous, self-altering activity of consciousness: nature, language, consciousness, and the divine, at once *idem et alter*, the same and different – an idea that goes to the heart of his metaphysics.

The urgency, compression and exclamatory quality in Coleridge’s writing again transcends the merely referential – it is gestural and performative, an utterance of the imaginative moment, which both embodies and acts as an ‘intuition’ in the sense that Coleridge uses it: ‘a direct and immediate beholding or presentation’, an *experiential* rather than merely propositional form of knowledge (*Shorter Works and Fragments*, I 369). In another extraordinary meditation on the suggestively paradoxical life of water, Coleridge recognises the contingency of the body and the mind – the *medium* of experience – in the participatory nature of perception:

The *white rose* of Eddy-foam, where the stream ran into a scooped or scalloped hollow of the Rock in its channel—this Shape, an exact white rose, was for ever overpowered by the Stream rushing down in upon it, and still obstinate in resurrection it spread up into the Scollop, by fits & starts, *blossoming* in a moment into a full Flower.—Hung over the Bridge, & musing[,] considering how much of this Scene of endless variety in Identity was Nature’s—how much the living organ’s! What would it be if I had the eyes of a fly!—what if the blunt eye of a Brobdi[n]gnag!— (*Notebooks*, I 1589)<sup>23</sup>

Language itself, of course, is involved in this contingency – but neither the contingency of body, mind or language invalidates the experience in which they are implicated: on the contrary, that contingency enables the very possibility of experience. Coleridge’s exquisite evocation of the ‘*white rose* of Eddy-foam’,<sup>24</sup> for example – at once ‘overpowered’, ‘obstinate in resurrection’ and ‘*blossoming* in a moment’ – is itself a way of ‘seeing’: the product and productivity of language as an *organ*.<sup>25</sup> The self-generating, conative activity of language, however, enables that organ to change – and in this way, poetry, and the poetry inherent to language, involves the promise and the possibility of ‘seeing’ with other ‘eyes’, experiencing other reality.

From his earliest days as a walker, Coleridge makes a vital connection between his movement through landscape and his poetry. He bought one of his first notebooks for his walking tour through Wales in the summer of 1794 – ‘a little Blank Book, and portable Ink horn’ – because, he tells Southey, ‘as I journey onward, I ever and anon pluck the wild Flowers of Poesy’, and the notebook would help him keep hold of those experiences (*Letters*, I 84).<sup>26</sup> Coleridge later tells Hazlitt that he likes to compose poetry ‘walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the stragglings of a copse-wood’,<sup>27</sup> and that relationship between the dynamic, haptic encounter with the living forms of landscape and the life of his language is there in a striking notebook entry that describes a walk with Hazlitt and Southey through Borrowdale into Watendlath in October 1803:

Of course it was to me a mere walk; for I must be alone, if either my Imagination or Heart are to be excited or enriched. Yet even so I worshipped with deep feeling the grand outline & perpetual Forms, that are the guardians of Borrodale, & the presiding Majesty, yea, the very Soul of Keswick—

...

What was the name of that most vivid of all vivid green mosses by the side of the falling water, as we clomb down into Watendlath!—that red moss, too? And that blood-red Fungus?

...

write a Poem . . . so many Lines as I must find out may be distinctly recited during a moderate healthy man's walk from the Bridge thither—

...

O surely I might make a noble Poem of all my Youth—nay *of all my Life*—!—One section on plants & flowers, my passion for them, always deadened by their learned names.—Yet ever to note those that have & may hereafter affect me— (*Notebooks*, I 1610)

Coleridge's need to be alone for his 'Imagination or Heart' to be truly 'excited or enriched' suggests the importance of detaching himself from human company – that is, to de-socialise himself of the habituated norms of exclusively human society as he knew it – in order to become fully sensitised to his imaginative and affective relationship to the more-than-human world. Nevertheless, in his solitary recollection of the walk the intensity of his perceptual responsiveness leaps out – as in his enthusiasm for the 'enker-grene' of 'that most vivid of all vivid green mosses'.<sup>28</sup> He thinks about writing a poem on the landscape mapped to human motion through that landscape – which prompts the idea of a larger poem in which his attentive movement through landscape becomes a metaphor of his whole life.

That reference to his feeling for plants and flowers is significant in disclosing in Coleridge a paradoxical desire both to *name* and *not* to name (the moss, the fungus, the flowers). Coleridge implicitly recognises two contending orders of experience: one that could be called 'animistic' in the sense described above, which involves the in-the-moment intuition of life as a participatory relation – and the other a deliberate categorisation by reference to terms that have their origin outside the present experience, and necessarily removed from it. This second order of experience, Coleridge notices, 'deadens' his experience of the first. In this he anticipates John Fowles, who develops much the same point in his essay 'The Tree': Linnaean classification, Fowles writes – or even a 'running-back to past knowledge' – casts a 'veil of deadness, of having already happened, over the actual and present event or phenomenon'.<sup>29</sup> Fowles argues that the act of classification is deadening precisely because it separates the percipient being from what it perceives, vitiating that living relationship – and that this ingrains the instrumentalist and even hostile attitude both to nature and art that prevails in much of human culture, in contrast to the attitude that values both nature and art as an end in itself, undetermined by calculations of its quantitative utility. Coleridge's responsiveness to the more-than-human world, both in the life of his prose and his practice as a poet, aligns him with Fowles and this latter attitude.

Is there, though, a form of language that can at once both *name* and *un-name* – an utterance that enlivens rather than deadens, that embodies the dynamism of living relationship, that *knows* and *unknows* at one and the same time? Poetry, I contend – or at least, that order of poetry that I speak for – answers to and resolves these paradoxical needs. Language becomes poetry when it exceeds its *merely* referential function, and accentuates its affective qualities to achieve a supra-verbal force and presence. Its truth is not principally propositional, but rather – as Coleridge writes, quoting William Davenant – '*truth operative*,

*and by effects continually alive*’ (*Biographia*, II 127). Paul Valéry compares poetry to dancing, and ‘prose’ – or more accurately, merely referential language – to walking, because poetry involves the act ‘of creating, maintaining, and exalting a certain *state*’ in itself, and this makes it essentially *aesthetic*.<sup>30</sup> In Coleridge, however, the distinction between dancing and walking must be qualified, as an analogy, in that to enter and walk through landscape for its own sake *is* to exceed the subordination of the act to a purpose external to the experience: it is to create, maintain and exalt a certain *state*, seminal to poetry itself. To walk through landscape becomes a kind of dance with the more-than-human world, nourishing the dance of language at its living source: the common root of the *poetry* in both his verse and his prose.<sup>31</sup> In Coleridge, both walking and poetry assume their own intrinsic, affiliated purpose. Poetry does not (or should not) merely reapply prior classifications without modification, because to do so would involve merely passive ‘recognition’, in John Dewey’s term,<sup>32</sup> rather than the arousal of new orders of psychophysiological experience. Poetry actively *conjures* the responsiveness of the reader, stirring them into a ‘certain *state*’ of activity – in which Valéry’s dancer and Coleridge’s fascinated walker are one. The fact that poetry does not rely on unmodified, extrinsically-acquired classification means that its use of language is both conative and self-fulfilling: that is, the embodiment of its *attempt* to say what has not been said, to realise what has not been realised – in affective, non-referential as well as referential ways – is coeval with its achievement. Poetry – indeed all imaginative literature – transcends the merely instrumental and becomes seminative because (as Colin Falck writes) it is ‘concerned with the *creation of terms* rather than with the manipulative handling of them’.<sup>33</sup> The spontaneous, synthetic complexity of our participatory, preverbal life means that there will always be, in Merleau-Ponty’s phrase, ‘*that which demands creation from us* in order for us to have experience of it’,<sup>34</sup> and it is to this that the productive provisionality of poetry responds. ‘Poetry’, Robin Skelton observes, ‘because it is highly patterned, controls a great deal of the semantic instability of language, even while obliging us to recognize it’.<sup>35</sup> Poetry is its own *naming*, but resists the deadening effect of mere classification by drawing attention to that naming as a living, self-altering act, which – like nature, as Coleridge describes it – is ‘for ever unravelling what she had woven, for ever weaving what she had unravelled’ (*Notebooks*, II 2351).

Poetry, then, acts as a form of life in ways analogous to contact with the living forms of nature, to which our own being bears a participatory relation. Like Coleridge’s adventures in landscape, it involves ‘actions whose end is in themselves’, as Valéry says.<sup>36</sup> Valéry’s point prefigures those made by several subsequent poets: Eliot writes that a work of art is ‘autotelic’;<sup>37</sup> Wallace Stevens that ‘The poem is the cry of its occasion, / Part of the res itself and not about it’;<sup>38</sup> Robert Lowell that a poem ‘is an event, not the record of an event’;<sup>39</sup> Don Paterson (echoing Lowell) that ‘poems *are* the epiphany, not its documentary evidence’.<sup>40</sup> All of these ideas – that the ends of poetry are in its means – in fact trace back to Coleridge as *a poet in landscape*, for whom a poem should carry the reader forward, not ‘by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasureable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself’ (*Biographia*, II 14): art or ‘Poesy’ is its own ‘self-witnessing, and self-effected sphere of agency’ (*Notebooks*, III 4397).

The relation between poetry, nature and movement in Coleridge, then, follows this pattern: participatory experience in the ineffable life of the more-than-human landscape stimulates the self-altering life of language – a poetry – that reacts upon the altering self, altering the quality of his experience of that landscape, but in ways analogous to the in-the-moment intuition of life, which resist the effects of mere classification.<sup>41</sup> The productive provisionality of poetry at once names and un-names, because its holophrastic character – its synthetic utterance of complex experience – returns us to the active, dynamic and



participatory character of our perception. In this way, poetry enlivens rather than deadens – and the interplay between *nature* and *culture* is not antithetical, but authentically creative.

Coleridge's poetry presents both the matrix and the realisation of his poetics. The prominence of the more-than-human world in the 'conversation poems', for example, is striking in his inclusion of that more-than-human world in the human 'conversation'. The 'green and silent spot, amid the hills' of 'Fears in Solitude' is a 'spirit-healing nook', a microcosm of the British landscape – the poet's 'sole / And most magnificent temple' – from which he has 'drunk in all my intellectual life, / All sweet sensations, all ennobling thoughts': its 'burst of prospect . . . seems like society— / Conversing with the mind, and giving it / A livelier impulse and a dance of thought!' (*Poems*, 215, 219, 220). In the earliest, epistolary version of 'This Lime-tree Bower my Prison', the landscape Coleridge describes is 'a living Thing / That acts upon the mind' (*Letters*, I 335), and as in the published version, the poem acts in the same way: an imaginative *invocation* of movement through landscape that *becomes* a kind of landscape – an affective field, constituted by its own 'shapes and sounds intelligible' ('Frost at Midnight': *Poems*, 139). It is at once immersive and ecstatic: a sensuous superabundance in which

my friend  
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,  
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round  
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem  
Less gross than bodily (*Poems*, 120)

The 'friend', of course, is Charles Lamb, and the poem is a kind of wish, in which wish, act and achievement are simultaneous: it is at once conative and self-fulfilling. The poem's final line – 'No sound is dissonant which tells of Life' (*Poems*, 120) – implies the mysteriously affective 'charm' in the sounds of both the more-than-human world and the sounds of the poem itself.

The effect here – everywhere characteristic of Coleridge's 'poetry of nature' – is at once soothing and disquieting, pleasurable and unsettling.<sup>42</sup> It is crucial to recognise that this is *not* a poetry of complacency, as in the cliché of the 'nature poem'.<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, it is revivifying precisely because it challenges the psychic, emotional and intellectual inertia into which human beings so typically lapse – as Coleridge says, 'we stop in the sense of Life just when we are not *forced* to go on' (*Notebooks*, III 3632). It acts – like the stimulus of the more-than-human world – as an altering, quickening force on human becoming. This productive tension is woven into both the micronarratives and the language of the poems.

The youth of 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', found as a baby under a tree, 'wrapt in mosses, lined / With thistle-beards, and such small locks of wool / As hang on brambles' (*Poems*, 121) – as if spontaneously generated by the natural order – is at first exalted then finally imprisoned and exiled for becoming, through his deep experiential immersion in the more-than-human world, something almost more-than-human himself. He was 'most unteachable— / And never learnt a prayer, nor told a bead, / But knew the names of birds, and mock'd their notes, / And whistled, as he were a bird himself'<sup>44</sup> – a power transformed and perhaps carried over, in concert with his reading and human learning, into both his 'unlawful thoughts' and his spellbinding power of speech (*Poems*, 121-22). 'Frost at Midnight' begins with the 'secret ministry' of frost, and a palpably disquieting 'calm' that 'disturbs / And vexes meditation with a strange / And extreme silentness' – complicating from the start the stimulus of nature, with its 'lovely shapes and sounds intelligible' that by *giving*, make the spirit *ask*. This prefigures the way the psychic action of the poem subtly subverts the wish it invokes: the spirit that *asks* in the poem is distanced from the blessings he

imagines for his child – identifying instead, amid the ‘hush’, with the ‘sole unquiet thing’ – even as, in giving it, he shares in the blessing he gives (*Poems*, 137-9). As in ‘This Lime-tree Bower my Prison’, ‘Frost at Midnight’ – in its vicarious wandering ‘like a breeze / By lakes and sandy shores’ – enacts and makes present in its own ‘lovely shapes and sounds intelligible’ its own transnatural terrain: a psychic theatre, charged with transformative potential.

Both here and elsewhere, the concinnity and artfulness of Coleridge’s poetry draws attention to the active, participatory consciousness: the *altering self*, in the double sense of both agent and subject, at once altered by and altering that with which it comes into contact. This mutually affective dynamic is fundamental to the ‘different lore’ embodied in ‘The Nightingale’, where the poet compares a poetry of cliché (his own earlier poem ‘To the Nightingale’) to that generated by participatory commune with the living world – the willing exposure to more-than-human life:

And many a poet echoes the conceit;  
Poet who hath been building up the rhyme  
When he had better far have stretched his limbs  
Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell,  
By sun or moon-light, to the influxes  
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements  
Surrendering his whole spirit (*Poems*, 161)

In performative embodiment of this relation – like the lost youth of ‘The Foster-Mother’s Tale’ – the poem imitates the birdsong of the nightingales in the grove:

far and near,  
In wood and thicket, over the wide grove,  
They answer and provoke each other’s song,  
With skirmish and capricious passagings,  
And murmurs musical and swift jug jug,  
And one low piping sound more sweet than all—  
Stirring the air with such a harmony,  
That should you close your eyes, you might almost  
Forget it was not day! (*Poems*, 161)

The nightingales ‘answer and provoke each other’s songs’, just as they have provoked – in the poet open to the ‘influxes / Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements’ – the ‘answer’ that is the poem.<sup>45</sup> In the synaesthetic force of their song, the poem signals the activity of a creative power that generates a kind of psychic sunlight – prefiguring Coleridge’s later description of the way poetry commands ‘the *vestigia communia* of the senses, the latency of all in each, and more especially as by a magical *penna duplex*, the excitement of vision by sound and the exponents of sound’ (*Biographia*, II 128).<sup>46</sup> Aroused and nourished by this experiential interplay to which he has directed his being, the poet’s ‘song / Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself / Be loved like Nature!’ (*Poems*, 161). A poem, that is, should possess a creative agency that acts as a source of life itself: the power to alter the living relations of the given world. As Wordsworth would later write, such poetry aspires to be ‘A power like one of Nature’s’.<sup>47</sup>

From all of this, it is clear that both nature and poetry require something of us, if our experience of either is to quicken our own becoming. This is that willing exposure of the self to the self-altering influences of the life beyond our deliberate control – manifest in

Coleridge's elective organicism – to which I have already alluded, and to the articulation of which 'The Nightingale' is seminal. The experience of natural, living forms and of poetry (whether as reader or writer) can of course stimulate and draw this state of spontaneous attentiveness into being, and its spontaneity can be cultivated: like poetic metre, in Coleridge's description, it involves 'an interpenetration of passion and of will, of *spontaneous* impulse and of *voluntary* purpose' (*Biographia*, II 65). It fuses the active with the passive. It is not a graspingly acquisitive state, but rather, as David Constantine writes, 'patient, watchful, open, both waiting for and an assistant at the realization, the event'.<sup>48</sup>

To recognise that the quality of own experience depends in vital ways upon a state or disposition in ourselves is also to recognise that our *ideas*, however latently and implicitly, play a similarly vital role in our reception of sensory experience – a role that may be *animating* or *disanimating*. This, moreover, is to acknowledge 'the immense importance of Education', to which Coleridge returns time and again – the education that 'entwines Thought with the living Substance, the nerves of sensation, the organ of soul, the muscles of motion, and this, finally, with the *Will*'.<sup>49</sup> As G.K. Chesterton memorably remarks: 'They say travel broadens the mind; but you must have the mind'.<sup>50</sup> This is not a matter of information – that is, the mere accumulation of data, commonly referred to as 'knowledge' – but of attitude: a *self-educative attitude*, which corresponds to a quality of attention. This state of enlivened receptivity might be understood in the difference between *looking* and *seeing*, or *listening* and *hearing*, where the first of each pair of terms (for present, illustrative purposes, at least) implies an awakened attentiveness, at once outward and inward – as opposed to a sensory life that may pass unheeded. To put this in epistemological terms current with Coleridge: our apprehension of reality involves the interfusion of the knower and the known. As Goethe puts it, succinctly: 'the phenomenon is not detached from the observer, but intertwined and involved with him'.<sup>51</sup>

This implies a responsibility for the ecology of our own minds, as agents whose thoughts and actions have consequences both for ourselves and others, human and non-human, which also grounds our responsibility to the natural and social ecology we inhabit. In Coleridge's elective organicism, the self-directing of our own being, growth and becoming – especially because we are *not* entirely in control of such becoming – is fundamental: in directing the 'productive power' (*Friend*, I 497) inherent in all nature, he maintained, 'Man might be considered in a secondary sense *his own creator*', not only improving upon but creating new faculties of being (*Lectures on Literature*, I 192). Through our *arts* – in the comprehensive sense that includes our sciences – we are (or should be) active in the development of our own 'nature', as a species. To put it another way: our *self-cultivation* is our *self-naturing*.

The pattern and poetics that I describe reconciles a Promethean humanism with a heightened sensitivity to the more-than-human world. As so often, Coleridge's most audacious ideas of the poet are developed in his reading of Shakespeare, as 'a Nature humanized, a genial Understanding directing self-consciously a power and a[n] <implicit> wisdom deeper than Consciousness' (*Lectures on Literature*, I 495) – like 'mysterious Pan', in Coleridge's description, embodying an 'intelligence blended with a darker power, deeper, mightier, and more universal than the conscious intellect of man' (*Biographia*, II 117). It is for this metaphysic of poetry and its relation to nature that I use the word 'transnatural'.

To do so is to pour the principal ideas of this essay into the crucible of that word, so in the paragraphs that follow I shall draw together the implications of my argument. Poetry is transnatural language: a language that alters its own nature, differentiating itself from its merely referential, denotative function, in order to act in ways that exceed that function. 'Poetry signals its strangeness', as Constantine says.<sup>52</sup> In doing so, its purposive impulse is to achieve an unusually psychoactive somatic power: the magical 'double life' of words as both physiologically affective sound and semantic, conceptual sense, which Velimir Khlebnikov



interview in 2014, the poet Alice Oswald rejects the ‘nature poet label’ – as I do – but describes her pleasure in the ‘slow performance’ of natural rhythms and vegetative life, and goes on to say that ‘nature poetry is just another kind of metaphysical poetry and is exactly what I like. But I think the best nature poets are Homer, Ovid, Shakespeare, because they include the human and the non-human in the same picture. How can you categorise that?’<sup>59</sup> My suggested term for such a ‘metaphysical poetry’<sup>60</sup> – which actively blends both the human and the non-human, the natural and the imaginal, in its experiential compass – is ‘transnatural poetry’. Coleridge’s distinctive place in the history of Anglophone poetics, I argue, extends beyond his long-recognised status either as a ‘nature poet’, a ‘supernatural’ poet, or a forerunner of literary modernism, significant as these are: as an exemplar of the relationship between language and landscape, the common root of spontaneity and pattern within that relationship, and a poetics of ‘charm’ that transcends the divide between verse and prose, he is a pioneering poet-critic of the transnatural – and as such, at once retains his own character as a poet and exceeds the limitations of many of his later, equally canonical students. The new relation between the ‘natural’ and the ‘artful’ that – in this reading of Coleridge – I have implicated in the transnatural, resists their conventional binary antipathy, and in contrast affirms the possibility that, in its poetry, the fictive life of language might achieve a special authority within our relationship to the more-than-human world.

One of the principal ways in which poetry achieves its distinctive authority is in its educative stimulus to our epistemic, empathetic and creative powers, in which it resembles the natural world itself. I have described above how poetry *knows* and *unknows* at one and the same time,<sup>61</sup> fostering ‘that wonderful connection between obscure feelings and Ideas’ (*Notebooks*, II 2559) that Coleridge also experienced in landscape. Both induce ‘yearnings & strivings of obscurity from *growing*’ (*Notebooks*, II 2509), acting as catalysts of being and becoming: ‘the Evolver’ (*Notebooks*, II 2546) that excites ‘the germinal power that craves no knowledge but what it can take up into itself . . . and re-produce in fruits of its own’ (*Friend*, I 473). The transnatural gnosis coeval with its *poiesis* is no deadening classification of experience, but an activated mystery: an organ of ‘Poetic Faith before which our common notions of philosophy give way’ (*Lectures on Literature*, I 362).

In the 1820s, Coleridge writes that metaphysics ‘is in its origin poetic: & in Poesy, that highest in which Phil[osophy] & Poetry interpenetrate, & mutually co-inhere it must end’ (*Notebooks*, IV 4692) – thereby effecting anew ‘the union of the sensuous and the philosophic mind’ (*Shorter Works and Fragments*, II 1267).<sup>62</sup> These remarks echo his much earlier contention that ‘a great Poet must be, implicite if not explicitè, a profound Metaphysician. He may not have it in logical coherence, in his Brain & Tongue; but he must have it by *Tact*’ (*Letters*, II 810). The poetics of the transnatural are a tactile metaphysics, at once spontaneous, primal and putatively ancient – returning poetry and philosophy to their experiential origin, the common root of art, religion and science – and an entirely new articulation of the existentially productive relationship between poetry and nature: the way, at its best, ‘the art of poetry adds to the stock of available reality’.<sup>63</sup>

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The preceding essay, in one sense, traces the course from Coleridge’s transnatural landscapes to my own. The following poem is taken from my collection *The Fetch*.<sup>64</sup> Two audio recordings of the poem – one with an added soundscape – made by Soundbite Recordings are available online (together with recordings of three other poems of mine from *The Fetch*).<sup>65</sup> Clowes Wood is not far from where I live in north Worcestershire.

*Homo Divivus*

I found it at the southern fall  
of Clowes Wood – a path I could not walk  
without stones in my pockets to carry me  
down past the soft prints  
sunk through the clutch of mud and under  
water and our breathing, where  
I could not go but they had gone.  
Conditions were perfect:  
three days of dry weather, early April  
afternoon, the leaves of oak  
still to come. I had the luck  
of the wanderer – woken up  
by a thrush trying out all its notes  
as if the combination would unlock  
a second sun. I have named the twice-living  
as if they were human,  
but they are ultraviolet to visible light.  
What's the use of having found them  
except to tell us that we do not know  
the world we inhabit, even when  
they are so close, alter the earth  
in ways akin to us, though passing  
where we cannot, in sight of what  
we cannot see. They are in hiding  
from ignorance – withheld from us  
like plumage on a forest bird  
now extinct – a presence whose traces  
move us, whose pattern lives  
in other forms: the cuticle of beech  
and the flight between, the circuit  
of bine, verdigris lichen, the slant  
tow of sky, the rainbow  
sheen that blooms on the marsh,  
their anaerobic speech.  
To imagine them is to become  
like them, to haunt a place  
as they do – eyes too open,  
amoral as joy. I hear  
the hazel buds unfold, listen  
until, like them, I am  
diffused, in Clowes Wood,  
a shadow in sound. No more.

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<sup>1</sup> S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (London and Princeton, 1983), II 5. Henceforth cited as *Biographia*.

<sup>2</sup> See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London, 1976), 219-24.

<sup>3</sup> A.W. Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (1809-11), in A.W. Schlegel, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Eduard Böcking (Leipzig, 1846-47), VI 161.

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- <sup>4</sup> The title of my essay loosely alludes to the title of Gilbert Highet's book, *Poets in a Landscape* (Harmondsworth, 1959), in which Highet relates the style of several Latin poets – their 'choice of words, their placing, and the rhythms and melodies of sentence and paragraph' (156) – to both the landscapes and the cultures of poetry that they inhabited.
- <sup>5</sup> I use the term – which is found in Coleridge – as the skeleton key to my reading of his work in *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* (New York, 2011).
- <sup>6</sup> In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA and London, 1996), xviii.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn *et al*, 5 double vols. (London and Princeton, 1957–2002), III 3420. The English numerals relate to the entry number. Henceforth cited as *Notebooks*.
- <sup>8</sup> See *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination*, 47-52 *et passim*.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford, 1956–1971), I 658. Henceforth cited as *Letters*.
- <sup>10</sup> See Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford, 1999), 35-60.
- <sup>11</sup> Principally on 'i' and 'ee' sounds, s, d, and l.
- <sup>12</sup> See David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York, 1996), 44-72 *et passim*. Merleau-Ponty's own work develops in response to that of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, in particular.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 57.
- <sup>14</sup> H.W. Piper, *The Active Universe: Pantheism and the concept of Imagination in the English Romantic poets* (London, 1962), 4.
- <sup>15</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton' I. 42-3: *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, vol. 1, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London, 2015), 180.
- <sup>16</sup> The relationship to suffering and sickness in this regard is, of course, also very Coleridgean, discussion of which I must defer to another context.
- <sup>17</sup> Roger Scruton – summarising the view that he infers from F.R. Leavis on the idea of the 'Two Cultures' – emphasises the participatory character of cultural life: 'To possess a culture is not only to possess a body of knowledge or expertise; it is not simply to have accumulated facts, references and theories. It is to possess a sensibility, a response, a way of seeing things, which is in some special way redemptive. Culture is not a matter of academic knowledge but of participation. And participation changes not merely your thoughts and beliefs but your perceptions and emotions'. 'Modern Philosophy and the Neglect of Aesthetics', in *The Symbolic Order*, ed. Peter Abbs (Lewes, 1989), 27.
- <sup>18</sup> On Coleridge's initially reluctant use of the word 'multeity', see the third of his 'Essays on the Principles of Genial Criticism' in S.T. Coleridge, *Shorter Works and Fragments*, ed. H.J. Jackson and J.R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols (London and Princeton, 1995), I 369. Henceforth cited as *Shorter Works and Fragments*.
- <sup>19</sup> Both Merleau-Ponty and Abram have much to say on synaesthetic perception: see e.g. Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 59-62, 123-35.
- <sup>20</sup> S.T. Coleridge, *Poems*, ed. John Beer (London, 1986), 52. Henceforth cited as *Poems*.
- <sup>21</sup> This entry reworks the original note: see also *Notebooks*, I 495.
- <sup>22</sup> This image is entered under the heading 'EXTREMES MEET' – Coleridge's favourite saying (*Notebooks*, I 1725).
- <sup>23</sup> The giant Brobdingnagians feature in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Eddying' has long been recognised as a key word in Coleridge's vocabulary: see for example John Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* (London, 1977) and Edward Kessler, *Coleridge's Metaphors of Being* (Princeton, 1979). It has been suggested at the Coleridge Summer Conference that the appropriate collective noun for those attending – especially on the walks – would be an *eddy* of Coleridgeans.
- <sup>25</sup> Coleridge makes 'the blessed Organ of Language' central to his metaphysics in a notebook entry (*Notebooks*, I 1623) that would eventually be reproduced, with minor variations, in every iteration of *The Friend*: see S.T. Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, 2 vols (London and Princeton, 1969), II 73 and I 108. Henceforth cited as *Friend*.
- <sup>26</sup> On the course and significance of that early walking tour, see Gregory Leadbetter, 'Poetry, Politics and Portents: Coleridge and the Waters of Plynlimon', *The Coleridge Bulletin* 43 (NS) (Summer 2014), 29-36.
- <sup>27</sup> William Hazlitt, 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London, 1930-34), XVII 119.
- <sup>28</sup> The compound 'enker-grene' – meaning something like 'utter green' or 'vivid green' – is used of the Green Knight in the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (unknown in Coleridge's lifetime): see *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon (1925), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. ed. Norman Davis (Oxford, 1967).
- <sup>29</sup> John Fowles, *The Tree* (New York, 1983), 50. For Fowles's full discussion, and its significance for our relationship to nature, see 24-53 *et passim*.

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- <sup>30</sup> Paul Valéry, *The Art of Poetry*, trs. Denise Folliot (New York, 1958), 71.
- <sup>31</sup> As shown by the examples of Coleridge's responsiveness to nature that I have discussed, his prose is often 'poetry' in the sense that I describe. Lecturing in 1811, Coleridge says that 'metre and passion' are so closely connected that 'many of the finest passages we read in prose are in themselves, in point of metre, poetry—only they are forms of metre which we have not been familiarized to': 'wherever passion was, the language became a sort of metre': S.T. Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, ed. R.A. Foakes, 2 vols (London and Princeton, 1987), I 222, 223 (henceforth cited as *Lectures on Literature*). 'Poetry' (in this sense) in fact predates the much later distinction between poetry and prose. To put it another way, Coleridge's *poetry* is not limited to his verse: it is fundamental to the fabric of his language. In this, he presents an unusually fascinating – but not unique – case. On the poetics of Coleridge's prose in his letters, see Gregory Leadbetter, 'Hare and Hound: Ends and Means in Coleridge's Letters', in Madeleine Callaghan and Anthony Howe (eds.), *Romanticism and the Letter* (London, 2020).
- <sup>32</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (London, 1934), 53.
- <sup>33</sup> Colin Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature: Towards a True Post-Modernism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Cambridge, 1994), 62.
- <sup>34</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible* (Paris, 1964), 251.
- <sup>35</sup> Robin Skelton, *Poetic Truth* (London, 1978), 26.
- <sup>36</sup> Valéry, *Art of Poetry*, 70.
- <sup>37</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', *Criterion*, vol. II, no. 5 (October 1923), conveniently reproduced online at <https://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/2018/08/eliot-function-of-criticism/>.
- <sup>38</sup> From 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven': Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poems*, ed. John N. Serio and Chris Beyers (New York, 2015), 500. See also Anne Stevenson, *About Poems (And how poems are not about)* (Tarsset, 2017).
- <sup>39</sup> Robert Lowell, *Interviews and Memoirs* (Ann Arbor, 1988), 304.
- <sup>40</sup> Don Paterson, *The Poem: Lyric, Sign, Metre* (London, 2018), 100.
- <sup>41</sup> As Dewey puts it: 'Only when the past ceases to trouble and anticipations of the future are not perturbing is a being wholly united with his environment and therefore fully alive. Art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what is now': *Art as Experience*, 18.
- <sup>42</sup> For a detailed account of this quality in the 'conversation poems', see Leadbetter, *Coleridge and the Daemoniac Imagination*, chapter 5 *et passim*.
- <sup>43</sup> As an example of the paranoia now surrounding poetry in any way concerned with the natural world, the blurb on Richard Osmond's debut collection, *Useful Verses* (London, 2017) is at pains to say that his work is 'as far from any quaint and conservative notion of "nature poetry" as it is possible to get'.
- <sup>44</sup> Compare one of Coleridge's letters from 1802: 'A Poet's *Heart & Intellect* should be *combined, intimately combined & unified*, with the great appearances in Nature' (*Letters*, II 864).
- <sup>45</sup> The 'choral minstrelsy' of the nightingales' song, in the poem, itself bears a living relation to moonlight (*Poems*, 162): indeed, these nightingales have something of the 'lunatic, the lover, and the poet' (who are 'of imagination all compact': *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.i.7-8) about them. Compare Coleridge's own intense responsiveness to the moon, even to the point of 'worship': e.g. *Notebooks*, II 2453.
- <sup>46</sup> The '*vestigia communia*' is Coleridge's Latin compression of an idea he appears to have inferred from Francis Bacon (see *Biographia*, II 128 n. 3 and *Notebooks*, III 3587): the way the stimulation of one sense stimulates others. The '*penna duplex*' is a 'double pen'.
- <sup>47</sup> *The Prelude* [1805] XII.312, in William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York and London, 1979), 452.
- <sup>48</sup> David Constantine, *Poetry* (Oxford, 2013), 70.
- <sup>49</sup> S.T. Coleridge, in *Inquiring Spirit: A New Presentation of Coleridge from his Published and Unpublished Prose Writings*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (New York, 1951), 80.
- <sup>50</sup> G.K. Chesterton, 'The Shadow of the Shark', in *The Poet and the Lunatics: Episodes in the Life of Gabriel Gale* (London, 2001), 64.
- <sup>51</sup> J.W. Goethe, from 'Experiment as Intermediary between Subject and Object' (1793), in *Maxims and Reflections*, tr. Elizabeth Stopp (Harmondsworth, 1998), 155. I'm aware that on the face of it, this puts Goethe and Coleridge at odds with Bacon's entirely legitimate warnings about the 'Idols of the Tribe', and the 'infusion of the will and affections' in human sciences (Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (1620), Book One, §52 and §49, tr. J. Spedding, R.L. Ellis and D.D. Heath, ed. F.H. Anderson (London, 1960), 53, 52.) – but I hold that these are not necessarily irreconcilable, and may be read as part of the Baconian clarifying of the methods by which we proceed.
- <sup>52</sup> Constantine, *Poetry*, 4.
- <sup>53</sup> See Velimir Khlebnikov, *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov* (3 vols), vol. I: *Letters and Theoretical Writings*, tr. Paul Schmidt, ed. Charlotte Douglas (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), pp. 370-3.



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<sup>54</sup> Reuven Tsur, *On the Shore of Nothingness: A Study in Cognitive Poetics* (Exeter and Charlottesville, 2003), 210.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 209, 66.

<sup>56</sup> Coleridge also refers to this 'productive power' inherent in nature and humankind as 'natura naturans' (*Biographia*, I 240), 'nature naturing', again as contrasted with 'natura naturata', 'nature natured'. See also *Shorter Works and Fragments*, I 609, 688, and *Notebooks*, III 4397.

<sup>57</sup> *The Winter's Tale*, 4.iv.106-9, 12-14.

<sup>58</sup> 'Nature-making' both culturally, in mediating our collective apprehension the natural world, and spontaneously, as affective, aesthetic experience: as described above, *culture* and *nature* involve each other in this regard.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Max Porter in *The White Review* (August 2014):

<http://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-with-alice-oswald/>.

<sup>60</sup> Compare Oswald's remark to Coleridge, meditating in 1799 on the ways in which, when the mind 'gives itself up to a Poem as to a work of nature, Poetry gives most pleasure when only generally & not perfectly understood': characteristic, he wrote, of his delight in 'what I call metaphysical Poetry' (*Notebooks*, I 383).

<sup>61</sup> Derek Attridge argues that 'the work of art *resists* knowing, refuses to convey knowledge and refuses to be known as a cognitive entity': *The Work of Literature* (Oxford, 2015), 257.

<sup>62</sup> For Coleridge, it was implicit that a psychic revolution achieved by 'Poesy = ἀληθεια' would stimulate 'a total revolution of our governing notions and systems relatively to man' (*Shorter Works and Fragments*, II 1299).

<sup>63</sup> R.P. Blackmur, *Form and Value in Modern Poetry* (New York, 1952), 349.

<sup>64</sup> Gregory Leadbetter, *The Fetch* (Rugby, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/soundbiterecording/sets/poems-from-the-fetch-by>.